

READING WITH A PURPOSE

TEN  
PIVOTAL FIGURES  
OF HISTORY

AMBROSE W. VERNON



AMERICAN  
LIBRARY ASSOCIATION



7786

coll

et  
50

# Reading with a Purpose

## A Series of Reading Courses

1. BIOLOGY *Vernon Kellogg*
2. ENGLISH LITERATURE *W. N. C. Carlton*
3. TEN PIVOTAL FIGURES OF HISTORY  
*Ambrose W. Vernon*
4. SOME GREAT AMERICAN BOOKS  
*Dallas Lore Sharp*
6. FRONTIERS OF KNOWLEDGE  
*Jesse Lee Bennett*
7. EARS TO HEAR: A GUIDE FOR  
MUSIC LOVERS *Daniel Gregory Mason*
8. SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS  
*Howard W. Odum*
10. CONFLICTS IN AMERICAN PUBLIC  
OPINION *William Allen White  
and Walter E. Myer*
11. PSYCHOLOGY AND ITS USE  
*Everett Dean Martin*
13. OUR CHILDREN *M. V. O'Shea*

## *Others in Preparation*

5. ECONOMICS *Leon C. Marshall*
9. THE PHYSICAL SCIENCES *E. E. Slosson*
12. PHILOSOPHY *Alexander Meiklejohn*
14. RELIGION IN EVERYDAY LIFE  
*Wilfred T. Grenfell*
15. THE LIFE OF CHRIST *Rufus M. Jones*

American Library Association



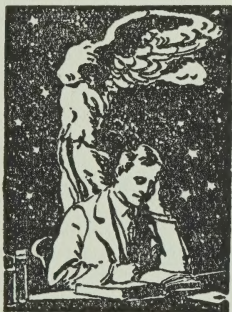
Reading with a Purpose

---

TEN  
PIVOTAL FIGURES  
OF HISTORY

*By*

AMBROSE W. VERNON



CHICAGO  
AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION  
1925

COPYRIGHT 1925, BY THE  
AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

---

PUBLISHED JULY, 1925

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

## WHY THIS COURSE IS PUBLISHED

**T**HIS course has been prepared for men and women, and for young people out of school, who wish to know more about the lives of the great in history. It comprises a very brief introduction to the subject and a guide to a few of the best books. The books are arranged for consecutive reading. They should be available in any general library, or may be obtained through any good book store.

A good general knowledge of the subject should result from following through the course of reading suggested in this booklet—a knowledge greatly superior to that of the average citizen. If you wish to pursue the subject further the librarian of your Public Library will be glad to make suggestions. If you desire to increase your knowledge in other fields, you are referred to the other courses in this Reading with a Purpose series, and to your Public Library.

THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

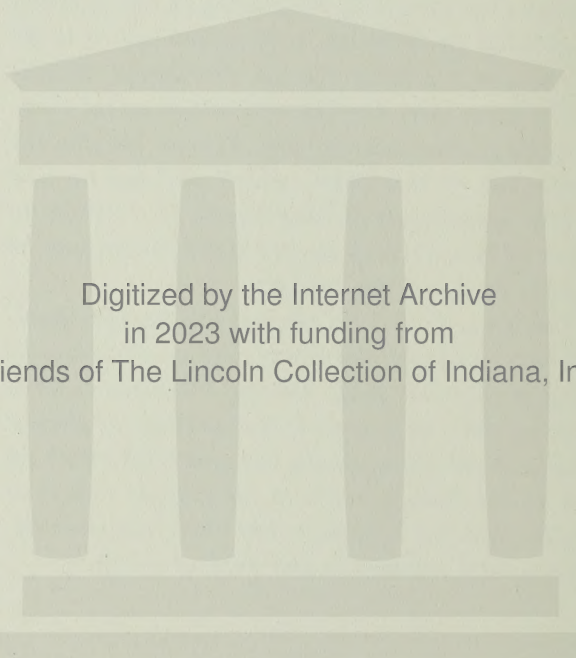




## The Author

**A**MBROSE W. VERNON is a pioneer in a new movement in the field of biography. When the first college Department of Biography in this country was established in 1919 Dr. Vernon was called to fill it. This was at Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota. Five years later Dartmouth College added biography to its curriculum and Dr. Vernon became the first occupant of this chair, which position he now holds. The enthusiasm of his students is a tribute to his power of transferring to others the fascination he finds in the study of this subject.

Dr. Vernon says that his interest had been gradually centering on biography for twenty years before he definitely made it his field. During this period, when he served at times as professor and at times as clergyman, he realized increasingly the powerful effect on history of the lives of certain individuals and it is largely through his influence that there has been developing a vital interest in this field of study.



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2023 with funding from  
Friends of The Lincoln Collection of Indiana, Inc.

## TEN PIVOTAL FIGURES OF HISTORY

### I

ONE of the most striking phenomena in the world of books today is the remarkable increase in the interest in biography. All over the world biographies which are at once scintillating and scholarly are being produced. It would, I think, be a safe assertion that never before has a contemporaneous group of biographers arisen which equals Gamaliel Bradford of America, Lytton Strachey of Great Britain, Georg Brandes of Denmark and—at a considerable remove—Giovanni Papini of Italy. Around these brilliant luminaries which shine in all quarters of the heavens there are grouped many writers who light a more restricted area but with steadiness and clarity. In our own country this skill in biographical writing is so marked that one of our leading critics has recently declared that biography threatens to become the favorite medium of self-expression in America. For the first time in educational history, moreover, chairs of biography have been established in our colleges. It would seem that in an age which is dominated by science and which has created sociology, men are becoming eager

that the incommensurable worth of human personality should not be ignored or slighted. It will, I hope, aid in explaining this present tendency and at the same time contribute slightly to its justification if we fix our attention on a few of the more significant pivotal figures of history.

For a long time a contest has been waging between those who hold that circumstances create people and those who hold that people create circumstances. In the former group are to be found those who support what is known as the "economic interpretation of history," fathered by Karl Marx and exemplified to a large extent in H. T. Buckle. One of the latest voices in this group is that of Mr. Calverton, editor of the *Modern Quarterly*, in his essay, "The great man illusion." Among the latter group there are found some of the most eminent thinkers and writers, even of recent times. For example, John Stuart Mill says: "The initiation of all wise and noble things comes from individuals, generally from some one individual." One of Ralph Waldo Emerson's best-known aphorisms is: "Every institution is but the lengthened shadow of a man." Almost as well known are Carlyle's words, "The history of what man has accomplished in this world is at bottom the history of the great men who have worked here. All things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result of thoughts that



dwelt in the great men sent into the world." Perhaps the most recent important utterance on this moot question is that of Henri Bergson, the most eminent living philosopher, which may be thus translated: "It is a mistake to believe that mass movements cause history. A great man stamps his personality upon an epoch by selecting things which are remotely possible and bringing them within the sphere of commonly accepted possibilities. On the whole the individual makes history."

One thing is at least certain, either that the individual makes history or that history is made through individuals. It is equally certain that some individuals have more to do with the making of history than others. Indeed there are points where the stream of human life seems distinctly to narrow itself and flow through a single personality, to drop its sediment, to make an evident bend and to flow forth more clear and more life-giving toward the sea.

Now those personalities who thus are at the turn of history we call pivotal personalities. Whether they are great cliffs against which life dashes itself only to be deflected from its course by their colossal strength, whether they are hidden springs which rise in the bed of the river or whether they are purifying sand over which the turgid stream runs and is lightened of its load—there are a few rare personalities along the course of human evolution who have

profoundly altered the habits and the channel and the quality of the stream. These personalities are not necessarily our greatest; they may not even be essentially noble in our eyes; they are perhaps more what Goethe would call demoniacal, clothed with a mysterious, sometimes even with a repelling, power, but whose qualities have made our personalities possible. Those qualities have indeed entered into ourselves and are to be carried, though transformed or sublimated, to "the sea where we go."

## II

It is quite out of the question in this brief booklet to consider all even of those unusual personalities through whom we find the main current of human life flowing from the rapids, where it first emerges into historic view, until it reaches the broad stream of our own day. We must therefore of course quite ignore the personalities who stand at the turning points of rivulets which, after a short turbulent career or a long meandering through pleasant fertile meadowland, empty themselves into the main river. The main stream of life, too, has several forks; they may unite at last but at present they water different territories, different continents, different races. We must limit ourselves therefore to that arm of the stream to which we Americans belong. We must think of it—for our purpose now—as rising in

Greece, as pursuing its way through Europe and then as being transmitted, as a gulf-stream, to the continent of North America. We must confine ourselves to a swift portrayal of those titanic personalities by means of which our own human life has been enriched and transformed.

I think we shall find four qualities characteristic of these pivotal personalities. Each of them had a vital, intuitive sense of value. Each possessed some unusually adequate means of inducing men to accept and realize this sense of value. Each identified himself almost completely with the clear vision of reality which possessed his soul. Each created new values, and hence new vital impulses and new channels of growth, for mankind. If we can only walk intimately with these men we shall be at grips with life in its most powerful incarnations.

#### SOCRATES

First of all let us think of Socrates. The world of proud and tiny Athens was divided into two chief groups. The members of

#### THE APOLOGY OF SOCRATES

*By Plato*

by far the larger group were holding on to the faith of their fathers. Notwithstanding the ever louder rumblings of their suppressed reasons, they kept bringing their offerings to the numerous altars of the

various gods, whose morals were as questionable as their existence, and insisting that upon such sacrifices, and the prayers which accompanied them, the security and the worth of the state depended. By their side was a far smaller group which made much more noise. They exploited the power of reason. They reveled in the sense of freedom and enlargement which utter reliance on reason brought. They poked fun at the feasting or angry gods and at the puerilities of their worshipers. They made a tolerable living and a great reputation from the delight of the young Athenians at their audacity.

Consorting with both these self-conscious groups, feared, suspected and finally hated by both, lived Socrates, the poor wise man. He never defended the gods yet he worshiped them. He relied on reason yet was quite as conscious of its weakness as of its power. He followed reason while he sacrificed to the gods. He followed it as it led plainly to the overthrow of both the pious majority and the arrogant minority and then he waited, courageously and humbly, for the light.

As he waited, the Sophists, who lived by their now discredited wits, and the solid citizens, who tried to live by their now discredited ancestral faith and sacrifices, both raged against him. As he waited, both his reason and a mysterious inner voice gave him enough light to walk by and a grow-



ing assurance of a larger light behind the clouds which were too dense for him to pierce. As he waited and questioned and analyzed, he trusted neither gods nor reason so much as the verities of justice and courage and moderation and wisdom which loomed upon his inner sight. These he revered, unable but eager to explain.

But this patient reverence seemed meager to the elders of Athens; it proved too austere to hold his most prominent disciples to civic virtue. At last, therefore, he was charged with impiety and corruption of young men and brought before his fellow citizens for trial. That trial, save for one held later in Jerusalem on a similar charge, is still the most pregnant trial in the history of the race. The defense of Socrates in his old age, as it reaches us through the majestic serenity of young Plato, remains the most consummate apology that a tribunal ever heard. It is a short autobiography incomparable in the realms of human literature. We know it as Plato's *Apology* and no one can afford not to read it. As Socrates left the court, condemned to death, he left words which have outlived the court—a leaven which has worked longer than the hemlock. “The difficulty, my friends, is not in avoiding death but in avoiding unrighteousness; for that runs faster than death. I am old and move slowly and the slower runner has overtaken me, and my accusers are keen

and quick and the faster runner, who is unrighteousness, has overtaken them. . . . Wherefore, O judges, be of good cheer about death and know this of a truth—that no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death. . . . The hour of departure has arrived and we go our ways—I to die and you to live. Which is better God only knows.”

It is little wonder that young Plato, sitting there, hearing some such words from the steady voice and seeing the steady light in the eyes of his master, should exalt virtue, wisdom, temperance and courage as divine, self-existent and incomprehensible realities and set them forth with such exuberance as to nourish the inner springs of man’s spirit for many critical centuries. From the soul of Socrates these eternal realities gained a new splendor. In his life, his sincerity, his patient inquiry, his heroic death, life turned as on a pivot and swung forward. By his courageous and noble death he has engraved securely upon the face of human life those values he perceived and championed.

#### ALEXANDER

LIFE OF ALEXANDER

*By Plutarch*

Less than a hundred years later than the martyrdom of Socrates, there was born another of these rare pivotal personalities of history, Alexander of Macedon, well called Alexander the Great. Mr.

Wheeler, the former president of the University of California, in his interesting biography of Alexander, declares that only Jesus of Nazareth was more important than he in clearing the way for the future development of the race. He did for the theater of life a work comparable to what Jesus did for its spirit. Also, Alexander died at the same age as Jesus and did his illustrious deeds in the three years which lie at the outset of the thirties.

His father Philip left him the first standing army of history, the leadership of the disputatious and recalcitrant Greeks, and a daring and recognized plan to conquer Asia. Within a year or so of his accession to the Macedonian throne, he had become the idol of the army, had ruthlessly put down uprisings in his kingdom and rebellion in Greece and had crossed the Hellespont for the subdual of the Persian hordes.

But he was not fundamentally interested in any of these things. They were all too commonplace, even the last of them. They served but as a whetstone on which he sharpened the keen edge of his spirit. It was not what he did but how he did it that interested him. It was glory not victory for which he thirsted. As a boy he refused to run save against kings. As the leader of his army he scorned winning the empire of the world by a surprise attack on the Persians by night. "I will not steal a victory," he

said. "The rewards of noble deeds are the deeds themselves," said this pupil of Aristotle, with a mind already filled with wonderings concerning the mysterious origin of the powers he felt within. He plunged into battle at the head of his army, sporting a white plume to attract the bitterest onset of his foe. Far from appropriating the peerless wife of the conquered Darius, he did not deign to look upon her face and loaded her with careless favors. Finding himself unattended upon the wall of an enemy's fortress, he leaped into it and single-handed, though gravely wounded, kept off the warriors—an authentic David, though with a more dangerous weapon than a sling—until his despairing troops fiercely rescued him.

On another occasion he was as like David as though he had been reading the Books of Samuel. As he was passing through a scorching desert, that he might conquer something more relentless than Persian scimitars, a soldier brought to him in a helmet some precious drops of water he had scooped up from a hidden crevice. But he poured them out upon the sands, saying he would drink only water of which all his soldiers could partake. His life is full to overflowing of both magnanimity and daring.

Plutarch's *Lives* has been for centuries the food of the noblest and Plutarch's essay upon Alexander is more stirring and exhilarating than a detective and fairy story combined. There was much that was not



admirable in Alexander—egotism, pride, magniloquence. His end was more than touched with disgrace. Endeavoring to console himself for the final refusal of his troops to push their conquering way over the mountains into India, or, seeking new realms for glory, he took to prolonged drinking bouts, out of one of which a fever harvested him for death.

But underneath all his accomplishments and his vanity was his delight in bravery, in activity, in glory. And as he learned to know the Persians, he found that they too, like the Greeks, honored bravery, marveled at his accomplishments, adored his puissant magnanimity, enhanced his glory. The idea of conquering them changed into the idea of enjoying them. Greeks still led his armies and commanded his ships but Persians set the fashion of the court and kept order in the East according to their ancient custom. Thus Alexander shook himself free of the aristocratic, confined, municipal idea of the Greeks and found himself at home in the full circle of humanity.

Therefore around this audacious, impetuous, uncontrollable youth, history made another turn. East and West had met and both were human. Humanity learned its strange diversity and stood before its age-long, and still unaccomplished, task. World consciousness was born. The great values were human values, not merely Grecian. A strange, brilliant youth, dramatically discovering their orbit, died won-

dering if he, and they, had not sprung from the divine. There was a unity wider than that of nation or even of race and color. Each individual man, indeed, unconsciously struck the roots of his own personality far deeper down.

### JULIUS CAESAR

CAESAR

*By James Anthony Froude*

But on Alexander's death, chaos ensued for two or three hundred years. It even invaded the compact city of Rome. Human rights, undisciplined and undefined, seemed to submerge the well-established rights of family, of tribe, of government. All men looked alike to one another, were of a size, yet were without a goal and tugged this way or that. Then Julius Caesar arose, bought his way to power and pulled the world together.

There is scarcely a more intricate riddle for a biographer's unraveling than the riddle of his personality. Many great men have attempted to solve it, from Suetonius and Plutarch to Mommsen, Froude, Ferrero, and now last year, at eighty years of age, Georg Brandes. No better beginning can be made with the riddle than by reading *Caesar* by James Anthony Froude, for underneath the delight of the style painstaking scholarship hides.

Unlike Alexander, Caesar has left us books. But,

again unlike Alexander, he has left us no sayings. His books are veils of his person. Evading the reprehensible idea of a kingdom, he rolled the republic into an empire and yet we scarcely know why. He was the first Fascist though he spoke fairer words concerning liberty than his modern imitator, Mussolini. In the iron of his epileptic being, there was something of firmer value than the glory which stirred impetuous Alexander. Was it power? Was it order? At all events, either in spite of, or because of, Brutus' dagger, the idea of Law emerged—of restraint, of discipline, of some great edifice the secret of whose beauty was proportion. And men began to prefer the chiseling which fitted them into a well-proportioned state to the freedom which left them as unused boulders on the shores of an indifferent sea. As an incoming ship throws a hawser around the creaking posts of the pier and warps her way into port, so humanity threw itself about the steadfast Caesar, shut down its engines and moved into calm water. And ever since, sometimes indeed much blurred and even submerged, the idea of order has been an inalienable quality of the human inheritance.

And "Caesar," the name of this man who built the race together, has in its twistings into "czar" and "kaiser" stamped itself on our consciousness. Ever since he crossed the Rubicon, we have been giving to Caesar the things which are Caesar's. The authorita-

tive statutes of governmental courts are flesh of Caesar's flesh.

PAUL

THE APOSTLE PAUL  
AND THE  
MODERN WORLD  
*By Francis G. Peabody*

But it is doubtful if Caesar would have fallen into our series of pivotal personalities of history, had not another and a greater closely followed

him. The man of Nazareth had lived and died a Jew. He had observed—though from free choice—the moral and the ceremonial law of his people. And after he had passed from earth—and even after the visions men saw of him after his passing had made earth new—many of his followers saw no reason to snap the bond which tied them to their nation and to abrogate the sacred law which he had honored.

In this critical moment, a young and zealous city-rabbi, whom we know as Saint Paul, was converted to the faith of which he was making havoc. The inclusion of his writings among the standard documents of the Church settled the fact that Christianity was to be an independent and world-embracing religion rather than a school of Jewish rabbinical thought. It is true that the "mystery religions," which had spread from Asia through the country of his birth, had accustomed people to the idea that a religion could cross national boundaries and unite in its fellowship



men of different races and cultures. It is true that the Roman Empire was governing, under a universal law, the diverse peoples among whom Alexander had lived. Men were becoming accustomed to other than national or racial unities. There were unities of rites and unities of government and unities of philosophical thought. But Paul was the first who, discarding commandments and subordinating ordinances, proclaimed a religion of the spirit.

It is doubtful if there be deeper tides in our civilization and culture than those which flow out from his personality. There is no bend in life's stream greater than that which is marked by his figure. For what did he do? Fresh from the meticulous attempt to keep the noblest law ever taken seriously by an entire people he announced its abrogation, though he still believed it was given from God. But recently glorying in the consciousness of being of the purest blood and of the strictest school in Israel—of sharing in a race consciousness the best grounded and most excusable and longest enduring which history records—he gained power to declare that for him there was no longer either Greek or Jew. Although this power to abrogate divine law and this ability to regard Gentile and Jew as equally his brethren came to him from a vision of a person, Jesus Christ, he scarcely quoted a word that person had spoken and set the world free from observing the law that person had

loyally kept. Surely these statements are enough to convince us that we are standing here before a supreme example of pivotal personality. What we may think of his influence and how it came to be, we may read in the latest untechnical appraisal of him, *The apostle Paul and the modern world* by Francis G. Peabody or, better still, in the *Epistle to the Galatians* itself.

The power which abrogated the law, which scorned the proud consciousness of race, which refused to copy the life of a divine master, was the discovery Paul made that his soul had been invaded and transformed and reborn and empowered by a spirit of which he had before never dreamed, a spirit of world-embracing and sin-engulfing love. Such was the splendor of that experience that in the face of his people and indeed of all peoples he declared: "Against love there is no law." "The letter killeth; the spirit giveth life." "The Lord is the spirit and where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

This supreme value accorded to the spirit of love is the issue of Paul's life. He made it possible that it should stand before mankind, extricated from all statutes and national hopes, as the fulfilment of all law, the unifier of all nations, the warrant of the divine Presence. It has been the renovating, revolutionary yet cohesive power at the heart of western culture. This belief is a personal reality, made not of phrases

or of movements but of human personality. It is of course quite possible that such a belief might have come far more gradually and impersonally but the splendor of Paul's experience was the actual power which carried it into the torn soul of Augustine and started the centuries anew upon their way, and into the confused soul of Luther who both released and repressed the deeper forces of our western civilization.

### LUTHER

That Luther is a pivotal personality in western history certainly no one can question. The course of it may be regarded as

changed for the better or for the worse but changed it has undoubtedly been. Perhaps it would be fairer to say that it has been changed both for the better and the worse. He loosed the bands which tied men to the unifying church. He wrote a tract entitled *The freedom of the Christian man* which has in it the divine audacity of the *Epistle to the Galatians*. He was, however, at a loss to know what to do with the bands whose ends were lying in his hands. He believed man to be as natively corrupt and as clearly in need of redemption as did the great Catholic church from which he seceded. And so he did not destroy these bands but threw one of them around the

MARTIN LUTHER, THE  
MAN AND HIS WORK

By Arthur C. McGiffert

Word of God as contained in the Bible and the other around the state as represented by the rulers.

To him, therefore, may be traced those dismal captivities which have fettered the human intellect and stirred the human passions but which, notwithstanding, have taught men to argue and to fight and to lisp the first syllables of independence. He tethered men to scripture and to state. But there has escaped from underneath these fetters that initial delight in the freedom of the Christian man and in his voluntary service to his fellows which gave men, first, self-respect in bondage and, finally, strength to break the bondage. What is to be insisted upon here, however, is that the flow of history has been actually and obviously determined by passing through the ardor of this domineering personality with its strange blend of idealism and realism. There is no better way of understanding the flow of that history than by digging down into the character of this peasant lad, as it is laid bare in such a work as McGiffert's *Martin Luther*, an impartial study.

FRANCIS BACON

LORD BACON By T. B. Macaulay
---------------------------------

Whatever damage Luther did by the exaltation of secondary authorities to an undue place in the management of human affairs, the confidence in individual experience and judgment which marked the height of

his career did not die out under the yoke which he gradually set upon government and religion. In Protestant England, the native tendency to independence was strengthened. At the same time a desire for certainty, no longer attainable in the church, arose in that practically minded country. The critical acumen, which Wicliff and Erasmus and Thomas More and Colet had applied to the early documents of Christianity, was transferred to the realm of nature.

Francis Bacon is the man in whom this pregnant change was realized. Pope is not far wrong in describing him as "the wisest, brightest, meanest of mankind." He was guilty of flattery, of taking bribes, of deserting friends. But his *Novum organum* marks a turning point in the history of the mind. Of this he was thoroughly conscious. "The object of philosophy," he writes in that veritably epoch-making production, "is threefold, God, nature and man, as there are likewise three kinds of rays, direct, refracted and reflected. Nature strikes the understanding with a ray direct; God, by reason of the unequal medium, with a ray refracted; man as shown to himself with a ray reflected."

Hence he sounded the bugle-call for what he called "the real business of the human race" and "the Greatest Birth of Time." He believed himself to be the appointed priest "to marry the mind of man to the nature of things" and summoned man "with minds



washed free from opinions" to study "the volume of Creation." So turning from the phantoms of the human mind he kindled "a light in nature"—"a light that should, by its very rising, touch and illuminate all the border regions that confine upon the circle of our present knowledge and so, spreading further and further, should presently disclose and bring into sight all that is most hidden in the world." He thus became, as he anticipated, "the benefactor of the human race, the propagator of man's empire over the universe, the champion of liberty."

The match with which he prepared to strike this "light in nature" was the principle of induction, of gathering an assembly of individual facts in the external world and making generalizations therefrom. "For," he said, "man is the servant and interpreter of nature; we can only conquer nature by first obeying her." His life, while by no means given over to science, was devoted largely to obtaining a worldly position of affluence, mostly for science's sake. His personal career, like that of Seneca, is a study in the ethics of compromise. But he was the recruit officer for the army of scientists. With him began the systematic attempt to conquer reality which has been furthered by Newton and Darwin, by Pasteur and Koch, by Morse and Bell and Marconi, by Roentgen and the Curies, by Edison and the Wrights. Even the most impersonal of the values of life is shot through

with the brilliant colors of a human personality. There is no more famous biographical essay in English literature than the essay on Bacon in Lord Macaulay's *Essays*. It is harsh but it is stimulating and intriguing.

### ROUSSEAU

Allowed to choose one more European for this short catalog of pivotal figures in history I name Jean Jacques Rousseau.

#### ROUSSEAU AND HIS ERA

By John Morley

In a much more fundamental and personal sense than Bacon, he too sounded the call "Back to Nature." In his *Social contract* he sounds it to government; in the *Nouvelle Héloïse* to the family; in *Émile*—perhaps the most influential book since Thomas Aquinas—to the church and the school. Yet, after all, his call is a misleading one; it should rather have been "On to Nature." For, so far as I know, there is no man before him who, with genius and intensity sufficient to arrest the attention of mankind, deliberately summoned man to stand upon his own feet and work out his own salvation. He believed in an untethered humanity. He believed that man's chief sin was his failure to recognize his own greatness. Man was to be redeemed chiefly from the thought that he needed redemption.

He believed in natural government, natural home

life, natural education, natural religion, and natural, unadorned, biography. In his *Confessions* he brings a human soul, just as it is, before the gaze of an entire world. He shows all its vices and its weaknesses and yet believes that what he shows is itself holy and itself its only God-given guide. In his *Émile* he dares mankind to allow a child to find his own slow way to truth, to usefulness, to God. Declaring that "every child who believes in God must be an idolater," he prays educators to give the child time to make his own path to the ineffable. He believed in man. He was convinced that man contained within himself instinctively all the essentials of religion—a belief in God, in brotherhood, in immortality—and needed no peculiar revelation from heaven. He believed that a man should have the liberty to think his own thoughts, to make his own customs, to preserve and to unfold his own sacred character.

Particularly he believed that a man should enjoy his own emotions of which love was the overlord. For him the supreme value of life was the unfolding and perfecting and enjoying of its fundamental emotions, which had been blurred by the clumsiness of society. Upon that value he staked all. This call of man away from the artificialities of church and court to the sacred temple of his own nature was the rallying-cry, and much of the dynamic force, for the convulsions of the French Revolution and the eloquence of

the Declaration of Independence. It gave the positive to Voltaire's negative, the emotional to Voltaire's rational, the rhetorical to Voltaire's satire and introduced the modern man in the modern state.

The perusal of Rousseau's *Confessions* and, particularly, of Rousseau's *Émile*, does more to acquaint us with our own origins, our dangers, and our powers than the mastery of many pages of the encyclopedias. In John Morley's *Rousseau* a free and lofty soul has given himself to the portrayal of the soul of a repellent egotist. We still, however, await a biographer who has more sympathy with deep, undisciplined emotion. Rousseau is, it seems to me, the father of modernism; Goethe and Heine, Carlyle and Coleridge, Robespierre and Anatole France, Emerson and Whitman, are in one way or another but members of his spiritual family.

#### WASHINGTON

There are but three American personalities through whom or because of whom the stream of des-

tiny has been conspicuously altered for us. Two of them are those whom every American child is taught to revere: Washington and Lincoln. Not, of course, that around their personalities such pregnant changes have revolved, such long shafts have been upgirded, as around those who have stood more "in the central

GEORGE WASHINGTON

By Woodrow Wilson

rush of life." Washington, however, stands at the cradle of America and Lincoln stands over her second birth. Upon what America does in a distinctive fashion depends to a great extent the final import of Washington and Lincoln in history. But that historic America owes itself to them is not, I think, too much to affirm.

Only Washington could have conquered without victories. Alexander is the only great general of history who never lost a battle. Washington seems almost the only great general—let Frederick of Prussia tell how great—who scarcely ever won a battle. Persistent, patient, subtle, firm, he carried us through our losing fight and later through our precarious national existence until men, counting the nations on their fingers, put America in. Lord Bryce has declared: "Washington stands alone and unapproachable, like a snow peak rising above its fellows."

Washington is one of those comparatively rare men who is called austere, not because he despises luxury and gayety and the light clanking of society's gilded chains, but because the elemental in him rounds itself aloft, like the high, broad dome of unimpressive Mont Blanc, from the gay slopes of luxury which reach from that dome quite naturally into green valleys. He was a man of property who wished to keep it unencumbered not only from debts voluntarily incurred but from debts imposed by a company of ex-



plotters, calling themselves Britain. He was an aristocrat who found the essence of aristocracy in freedom to command one's time and one's company. He was a soldier and a pioneer who found in co-operative independence the natural meaning of life. And so this aristocrat relying on what he himself called "an innate spirit of freedom" found himself devoting his life, his fortune, and his most sacred honor to proving that "liberty is the inalienable right of every man."

To see how deep-set our national idea of freedom is in the free union of independent men, and how largely our nation is indebted for both existence and ideals to the man whose "passion for freedom was born of personal pride," we can do no better than to read *George Washington* by Woodrow Wilson, a study marked more by insight than by historical research, a study of a Virginian by a Virginian, of a leader of liberty by a leader of liberty, of one masterful man by another masterful man.

#### LINCOLN

It is more doubtful if Lincoln should be regarded as a pivotal figure in history. His personality

stands more for cleansing than for turning. He straightened the channel or widened it rather than bent

#### LINCOLN

*By Nathaniel W. Stephenson*

it. In his own eyes he was a conserver of principle rather than a transformer. "The central idea in our political public opinion has continued to be the equality of men," he declared. He was willing to endure "whatever of inequality there seemed to be as a matter of actual necessity," to suffer slavery in its specifically limited area a while longer. It was against its extension that he struggled and for "a steady progress toward the practical equality of all men." It was granted him to free the slaves but that memorable deed was to him only an incident in upholding and clarifying those ideas of liberty which Jefferson, dipping them out of Rousseau, had enunciated as the platform and program of our Republic.

I think, however, it may be conceded that the life of America would have been incapable of the leadership that has come to it in the critical juncture of world affairs, through which we have recently passed, had it not been for Lincoln's flair for the possible and for his consummate wisdom in making it actual. Dean Brown of Yale in his brochure, *Lincoln the greatest man of the nineteenth century*, justifies his audacious title by the claim that Lincoln more definitely molded history and determined its flow than any man of his century. I am inclined to regard him as a pivotal figure even though the bend, for which he is responsible, is slight. He has given force to the current, even if he has not greatly changed its chan-

nel. There have been many studies of this fascinating character—by his law-partner, Herndon, by his secretary, John Hay, by the Englishman, Lord Charnwood, by the devoted Rothschild, but perhaps the best is by Nathaniel W. Stephenson in his *Lincoln*. In this volume Mr. Stephenson essays skilfully the difficult task of tracing Lincoln's inner development.

## WILSON

The third American whom I would mention in this succession of pivotal men is Woodrow Wilson. It is too soon to determine

WOODROW WILSON  
AND HIS WORK  
*By William E. Dodd*

his lasting significance. That he sought nothing less—or more—than the permanent integration of nationality in humanity, that he was prepared for chivalric action on the part of his own country because of his abiding faith in the Christian philosophy of life, that he staked his whole career upon this faith and that he was true to it in very different realms of action, there can be no doubt. That he has wrought the ideal of peace, of international brotherhood, of the practicability of disinterested idealism into the heart of man to a degree that no other statesman has approached, is, I believe, true. He had many faults of temper, he thought more highly of himself than he should; he saw steadily rather than widely; he belongs

rather to interpreters and expounders than to creators in the great domain of thought. But more signally than any other modern man I think he has proved the strength, the fascination, and the high challenge of the Christian ideal in the organized life of humanity. Perhaps no man has given us a more satisfactory appreciation of Wilson's character and the part he has played in history than William E. Dodd in *Woodrow Wilson and his work*. This is less a personal biography than a portrait of a statesman.

In this short sketch we have not sought to name the noblest men of history—Saint Louis, Saint Francis, Bernard, Leonardo, Livingstone. We have simply sought to take our stand at the great turning points of western history and to observe the personal elements—the personal suffering, the personal adventure, the personal values—which have either produced or richly colored them. And we promise that life will become both more intelligible and more mysterious, both more stirring and more baffling, more exhilarating and more sacred to all who make the intimate acquaintance of these dynamic characters of the human race.

## READING RECOMMENDED IN THIS COURSE

---

THE APOLOGY OF SOCRATES.....*Plato*

LIFE OF ALEXANDER.....*Plutarch*

CAESAR .....*James Anthony Froude*

THE APOSTLE PAUL AND THE MODERN WORLD

*Francis G. Peabody*

Macmillan, 1923. \$2.50

MARTIN LUTHER, THE MAN AND HIS WORK

*Arthur C. McGiffert*

Century, 1910. \$4.50

LORD BACON .....*T. B. Macaulay*

ROUSSEAU AND HIS ERA.....*John Morley*

Macmillan, rev. 1921. 2v., \$2.50 each.

GEORGE WASHINGTON.....*Woodrow Wilson*

Harper, 1896. \$3.00

LINCOLN.....*Nathaniel W. Stephenson*

Bobbs-Merrill, 1922. \$3.00

WOODROW WILSON AND HIS WORK.*William E. Dodd*

Doubleday, 1921. \$2.50











